

**Senate Estimates - 5 June 2024**

**Opening statement - Dr Jenny Donovan, CEO, AERO**

Thank you for inviting me again. Once again I will take the opportunity to update you on one of our recent projects.

Last time I opened by speaking about the extensive and rigorous evidence-base that exists to support an explicit teaching approach. I outlined what we know about how learning occurs in the brain, and how an explicit teaching approach aligns with and supports this process. This is an approach to teaching that supports learning for all students, harms none and is essential for some. I also described some of the work that AERO has published on this topic, including an evidence review, a model of learning and teaching, which sets out the practices which make up an evidence-based teaching approach, and the beginning of a library of practice guides and videos that explain and model each of those practices.

It is heartening to see teachers, schools and systems across the country move towards greater use of this evidence-base. Most recently, the ACT's Expert Panel, led by Professor Barney Dalgarno, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Canberra, has recommended that the ACT more consistently support evidence-based teaching across ACT government schools.

One part of evidence-based teaching, and a key practice in AERO's learning and teaching model, is identifying when a student requires additional support for their learning. Research suggests that some 20% of students will require additional support at some point in their schooling. For these students, it is crucial that their learning need is identified quickly, before learning loss accumulates and their sense of self-efficacy in school work is undermined.

Our evidence review identified that an approach called multi-tiered system of supports, or MTSS, is an effective approach to ensure all students receive the support they need. Under MTSS, a school focuses firstly on ensuring that Tier 1 teaching, that is, the teaching that happens for all students in all classrooms, is based on an explicit teaching approach. This includes regular formative assessment to understand where students are up to in their learning and to identify any students that are falling behind. If a student has fallen significantly behind their peers, more than a classroom teacher is able to address within a regular classroom setting, they are referred to a Tier 2 program, usually, small group tuition. In Tier 2, more intensive teaching is provided in the particular learning area that the student has struggled with, and here as well, an explicit approach to teaching is essential to success. For a small number of students, a Tier 3, or individualised intervention, will be required. The MTSS framework creates a commitment to ensure every student is learning, and a mechanism for schools to organise the supports that are necessary for that to occur.

Ensuring Tier 2 and 3 supports are available and commonly accessed is a common feature of education systems that have better equity outcomes than Australia, including Singapore, Estonia and Finland.

Since the last time I spoke with you, AERO has published a series of practice guides and case studies that support schools to implement the MTSS approach. The case studies feature schools in WA, SA, NSW, VIC and TAS who have already implemented and had success with this approach, explaining what they have done. I would recommend these resources to all schools and systems who are considering how they can best support all students, and make sure none fall and stay behind in their learning.